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End is nigh for Windows XP support

When Windows Vista launches later this year, people running Windows XP Home Edition will no longer get security updates, and from 1st January 2007 they will be unable to buy support. If they want to maintain Microsoft security updates and full support, they will have to upgrade to Vista.

Microsoft adopted a policy of fixed support lifecycles for its products in 2002. Business software such as Windows XP Professional is guaranteed 'mainstream support' for two years after the release of a new version of Windows, but this does not apply to consumer products.

Microsoft promises a five-year support cycle after the initial launch of a new product. In previous launches, support for older products has overlapped with that of newer ones because the company has

launched new versions of Windows every two or three years. However, long delays to the Windows Vista launch mean that support for XP Home Edition will stop almost as soon as Vista finally appears unless Microsoft has a change of heart.

In the past, Microsoft has bowed to pressure, and the company extended support for both Windows 98 and Windows Me by a couple of years. However, Microsoft is keen to drive take-up of its new operating system and seems to be in no mood to relent. "For Windows XP Home Edition, there will be no security updates after 31st December 2006," said a spokesman. "Users who want to continue to receive support [for non-security issues] after the Microsoft-assisted and paid support offerings have ended may visit the Retired Product Support Options website," he said.



The site (<http://support.microsoft.com/gp/retired>) suggests that you contact a third-party Microsoft partner or access "online content such as Knowledge Base articles, product information and support WebCasts". There are no security updates, 'non security hotfixes' or telephone support lines for retired products.

Symantec software uses virus technology

Symantec has admitted that a feature in its Norton SystemWorks package uses rootkit technology to install hidden directories in Windows, just weeks after the Sony BMG fiasco (see *Newsfile*, *Shopper* February 2006), in which such techniques were slammed for seriously compromising the security of PC systems.

The fact that Symantec's business is all about protecting PCs from security threats makes the revelation particularly embarrassing. The company made a statement on its website in which it acknowledged the potential security risk, saying, "Norton SystemWorks contains a feature called the Norton Protected Recycle Bin, which resides within the Microsoft Windows Recycler directory. The

Norton Protected Recycle Bin includes a directory called NProtect, which is hidden from Windows APIs. Files in the directory might not be scanned during scheduled or manual virus scans. This could potentially provide a location for an attacker to hide a malicious file on a computer."

Symantec said it had released a product update that displays the NProtect directory in the Windows interface and claims that the hidden directory had only a "low-risk impact". A spokesman said that, "to date, Symantec is not aware of any attempts by hackers to conceal malicious code in the NProtect folder". Despite this, the company "strongly" recommends that SystemWorks users update their software.

France moves to legalise file sharing

The French parliament has voted to legalise the sharing of copyrighted content over peer-to-peer networks. French law already protects the right of 'private copy', which is similar to 'fair use' in the US. Private copy makes it legal for people to copy music and video for themselves, their families and friends, as long as it is not for commercial gain. The amendment says that people can also use peer-to-peer file sharing to distribute such files.

The amendment faces enormous opposition from movie and music companies in France, and French courts may yet rule it illegal.

The vote was supported by Jean-Baptiste Soufron, Legal Counsel of the Association of Audionautes (www.audionautes.net), which is opposed to what it considers abusive threats from the music industry. "If the amendment survives, France would be the first country to legalise so-called peer-to-peer downloading," he said.



Apple threatens Windows with Intel Mac

Apple has launched its first Intel-based Macs six months ahead of the schedule CEO Steve Jobs promised last June. Analysts believe the move could help the Mac regain significant market share from Windows PCs. Jobs has also promised to make all Macs Intel-based by the end of 2006, a whole year ahead of his original schedule.

The two computers, a laptop and a new version of the iMac, use Intel's recently launched Core Duo chip, which contains two CPUs. According to Jobs, the new processor "delivers up to four times the performance" of the G4 chip in Apple's existing PowerBook line, and twice the performance of the G5 chip used in the iMac.

Apple's new Intel-based strategy could restart competition between PC operating systems, a battle that many had long assumed Microsoft Windows had won. During 2005 shipments of Macs rose by 32 per cent, compared with 16.4 per cent for the PC market, according to research firm IDC. This was during a period when many customers were believed to be waiting for the Intel-based Macs to appear, so further sales increases are likely. However, IDC calculated Apple's global market share during 2005 as just 2.3 per cent, compared with around 18 per cent for Dell.

Apple could close this gap before long, as IDC estimates that PC shipments will rise by only 10.5 per cent this year, while other

analysts predict that Mac sales will grow even faster. Piper Jaffray analyst Gene Munster said that the huge popularity of the iPod, 14 million of which were sold in the last three months of 2005 alone, is rekindling interest in Apple. He believes that 2006 will be "a year of Mac market share gains".

Other analysts agree. Needham & Co analyst Charlie Wolf predicts that the move to Intel will "materially increase Mac sales" through 2006 and notes that when Windows Vista is released, Intel-based Macs will be able to run both Windows and Mac OS X, and probably Linux, too. This unique selling proposition may appeal to business customers who abandoned the Mac long ago.



Shaw Wu at American Technology Research is even more bullish. "The Mac will get stronger. The Intel processor will give Apple the strongest product ever," he said, predicting that the US market share for Macs could nearly double, from four to seven per cent.

The future might look rosy for Apple, but more cautious observers point out that for Apple to reach even six per cent of global PC sales, the company would have to more than double its production. At a time when Intel is warning of shortages of its Core Duo chips, this could be a problem. "It will take years for Apple to increase its market share [significantly]," said Rob Enderle, chief analyst with the Enderle Group, "but this could be a foundation."

Sex worm strikes

A new deadly computer worm that relies on the human weakness for sexual titillation has emerged as a major threat to home users, according to the security specialist F-Secure.

While previous email malware successes have preyed on people's greed, nosiness and a predilection for gossip, the new worm, which F-Secure has named W32/Nyxem-E, appeals to even baser instincts.

Subjects in the email include "School girl fantasies gone bad",

"Kama Sutra pics", "Sex video" and "Miss Lebanon 2006". The body of the message includes phrases such as "Hot XXX Yahoo Groups and Videos Free!"

Within a few days of its discovery, the worm became the most commonly identified malware threat, according to F-Secure. "Our internal reporting system shows a steady stream of Nyxems being reported from all over the world, from the USA to Australia," said F-Secure. "If the worm keeps this

pace, Friday 3rd February might be nasty – that's when the destructive payload is programmed to strike for the first time."

The sex worm has a "dangerous payload", according to the company. When the date on the recipient's computer reaches the third day of any month, the worm runs an executable program called Update.exe. This finds and deletes Office files along with a list of other file formats including PDFs, Zip files and Photoshop images.

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ADOBE ACROBAT MAKES 3D LEAP

Adobe has introduced new tools for embedding 3D images into PDF files. Acrobat 3D makes it easy for people who work with 3D models to convert them from the major CAD formats into PDFs.

The software includes tools for editing lighting, adding textures and materials and creating animations such as assembly and disassembly instructions within the PDF file. It also extends Adobe Reader capabilities so that users can view the structure of products, and adds commenting, measurement and cross-section tools directly on 3D objects.

INTERNET EXPLORER 7 LEAKS ON TO NET

Microsoft has promised to make a version of Internet Explorer 7 available in the first quarter of this year, but excited users have already had a first taste. Windows fans downloaded a preview copy of the browser (build 5299) after it and numerous screenshots were posted to a technical web forum.

Microsoft had the link to the code removed from JCRP.net, but not before several thousand expectant fans had already pointed their browsers at it and downloaded the file.

SONY PLANS DIGITAL SLR CAMERA PUSH

Sony is planning to storm the digital SLR camera market after acquiring the digital photography assets of Konica Minolta, which announced that it is pulling out of the market.

Canon and Nikon currently dominate the SLR market, and Sony will also face tough competition from Pentax and Olympus as it tries to grab a substantial share of a fast-growing and lucrative sector.

Despite being the world's second-biggest digital camcorder maker, Sony has made little impact in this particular area of personal electronics. It now plans to gain at least 25 per cent of the available market share by introducing less expensive models than are currently available.



NEWS

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LEGAL DOWNLOADERS OUTNUMBER PIRATES

The value of digital music sales in the UK and Germany trebled in 2005. Downloads and ringtones generated \$1.1 billion (around £600 million) and accounted for six per cent of record company revenues. Consumers bought more than 420 million single tracks, 20 times more than in 2004, and the number of songs available doubled.

The International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI) said the number of download buyers in Europe's two biggest markets surpassed the number sharing files over peer-to-peer systems. While the number of file sharers has not fallen, "the findings are a positive indication that attitudes are changing," according to the IFPI.

TIME BACK AGAIN

Time-branded PCs, which disappeared when Granville Technology Group went bust last summer, are to make a comeback. A new direct seller, TimeUK.com, will be selling Time PCs by the time you read this. The Time brand was one of the biggest in the UK. The PCs were sold by mail order, often through full-page adverts in the national press, as well as through a chain of high street shops. The same Blackburn-based family that launched the Time brand are behind the new operation.

MILLION DOLLAR HOMEPAGE EXTORTION

The owner of the Million Dollar Homepage has been hit by extortion attempts and denial-of-service (DoS) attacks.

Alex Tew's brainwave of selling adverts on a web page by the pixel, at a dollar a dot, made the magic million early in January, earning a lot of publicity into the bargain. But just days after revealing his success, 21-year-old Tew received an email demanding he pay \$5,000 (around £2,800), or risk his site being taken down with a DoS attack. He ignored the email and the site was attacked three days later. It was rescued by a company that specialises in defending against DoS attacks.

Google Video launches with pets, porn and I Love Lucy

Google has announced the launch of Google Video Marketplace, a slightly anarchic video download service that provides paid-for content alongside the work of enthusiastic amateurs. It offers commercial video content from ITN, along with US broadcasters such as CBS and music videos from Sony BMG. TV shows, including episodes from *I Love Lucy*, also feature. The service competes directly with Apple's iTunes Music Store, which recently added paid-for video downloads.

Google has introduced a free video player with the usual playback options such as play, pause and stop, as well as thumbnail navigation that enables you to browse through an entire video. Google says that video



Google Video Marketplace provides paid-for and amateur video content

footage free from copy protection will also be available in formats ready for iPods and Sony PSPs.

Google's approach couldn't be more different from that of Apple's tightly controlled iTunes Music Store.

Google's Video Store, still officially in beta, lets anyone upload a video and charge what they like for it. Sony is selling music videos for \$1.99 each (around £1.10). Customers currently need a US-issued credit card.

Google appears to have made little effort to organise, categorise or vet content. Instead, the company has taken a hands-off approach and uses its usual algorithm-based search engine to search for content.

Visitors to the video.google.com site are reporting a distinctly mixed experience, with violent and pornographic content, much of which is home made, appearing next to movies of people's pets and US shows from the 1950s. This is despite Google Video's terms and conditions, which ban pornography.

Spyware discovered in iTunes

Apple has found itself in hot water after customers discovered that a feature in iTunes was collecting data about them and sending it to a research company. The new MiniStore, which is included in the recent iTunes 6.0.2 upgrade, was found to collect information on users' clicks. It sent this information to Apple and a data analysis company called Omniture.

Angry customers criticised MiniStore as a piece of corporate spyware, designed to extract information covertly on a customer's preferences and then send back customised suggestions for future purchases.

Apple initially responded to the concerns of internet privacy groups by claiming that MiniStore, which appears in a window at the bottom of the iTunes Music Store interface, could be switched off so that it would no longer transmit user data. The company also claimed that no other personal data was being sent and that, once it had been used to prompt a purchase option, the data was discarded.

Using buying habits to create recommendations is nothing new. Amazon's online store is a well-known example. Google's entire business model is based on feeding advertisements to users based on their search criteria, and its Gmail service, which uses personal data in emails to target adverts, is arguably more of an intrusion of privacy than using information based on a person's taste in music or videos.

Apple later decided to switch MiniStore off by default. The MiniStore now produces a dialog box when activated that warns: "The iTunes MiniStore allows you to discover new music and videos right from your iTunes Library. As you select items in your Library, information about that item is sent to Apple and the MiniStore shows you related songs or videos."

"We've listened to our users and made access to the MiniStore an opt-in feature," said an Apple spokesman. "Apple does not keep any information related to the contents of our users' music library," he added.

New cell chips for gadgets

The Cell processor, which will be at the heart of the Sony PlayStation 3 when it launches later this year, is here to stay. IBM, Sony and Toshiba will develop a new generation of the chip for use in consumer electronics.

Semiconductor analysts said IBM and its partners are focusing on consumer electronics rather than the PC market, which Intel and AMD have got sewn up. IBM and its partners are committed to spending hundreds of millions of dollars to create smaller and cooler-running versions of Cell that will run in embedded devices, games consoles and multifunction mobile phones. IBM is working on a 32-nanometre version of the Cell chip, which will be compact, fast and generate less heat than larger chips.

The first-generation Cell will appear in the PlayStation 3 and be at least twice as powerful as the PowerPC-based chip that IBM created for Microsoft's Xbox 360. A new generation of Cell will appear in consumer electronics products such as HD TVs from Toshiba and home entertainment systems. Cell is set to provide strong competition to Viiv, Intel's new PC home entertainment processor platform.



Wikipedia rival planned

A new online encyclopedia is being prepared by a team including Larry Sanger, who helped found Wikipedia. Wikipedia, which is an online encyclopedia that the public can edit, has suffered some high-profile criticism after publishing specific and malicious untruths as well as general inaccuracy.

The new venture, called Digital Universe, wants to take the best from Wikipedia's approach, where anyone is welcome to contribute, but also employ teams of experts to edit and approve articles.

The problem that Digital Universe faces is how to pay for such expertise, while keeping the service free for people to access and contribute to. This freedom is one of the main reasons for Wikipedia's phenomenal growth.

Sanger, who said he left Wikipedia because it gave too much credence to "difficult people, trolls [trouble-makers] and their enablers",

claims that Digital Universe has already raised \$10 million (around £5.7 million) to get his project up and running.

Even Wikipedia, which until recently was run entirely on a volunteer basis with just a couple of full-time staff and a miniscule budget, has begun an appeal for donations to help it oversee content more effectively. In December, Wikipedia was embarrassed by an article, posted as a joke, that falsely implicated a former assistant to Robert Kennedy with his murder and that of his brother, President JF Kennedy. Wikipedia was then slammed for being inaccurate and irresponsible by the media and the editors of traditional encyclopedias.

Digital Universe hopes that its more structured approach will not only avoid such pitfalls but will also provide a non-profit alternative to commercial data providers. "The vision of the Digital Universe is to essentially provide an ad-free

alternative to the likes of AOL and Yahoo! on the internet," said co-founder Joe Firmage. "Instead of building it through web robots, we're building it through a web of experts at hundreds of institutions throughout the world.

"As search engines and online advertising dollars are increasingly focused on driving traffic to commercial content, the voices of non-profit, non-governmental organisations and even important research from leading scientists is decreasing in visibility on the web. Nobody should 'own' the repository of human knowledge," Firmage said.

"With a commitment to open-source technology, free access to information and a service-motivated leadership model, the public can literally take back the web." Firmage concluded: "It will take charitable donations from individuals and organisations to maintain the quality and effectiveness of the Digital Universe."

New office and graphics apps revealed

Corel has launched two new major releases of its graphics and office software. The company claims that WordPerfect Office X3 is more compatible with Microsoft Office than previous versions, and has the "unique" feature among integrated office suites of being able to export to and import from PDFs.

The company has also released CorelDraw X3, the latest version of its popular graphics software.

An enhanced bitmap to vector tracing utility called PowerTRACE is among the latest new features, as is a more project-oriented approach. Corel recognises the home enthusiast as a major user of its graphics software and has attempted to make it more accessible to those with less experience in graphic design.



Motorola makes mobile deals

Motorola has announced a three-year deal with Google, where it will include a Google icon on some phone handsets to provide one-touch access to the search engine and the web. "I think this is the beginning of the mobile broadband internet," claimed Motorola CEO Ed Zander.

"The Google icon will take users right from their phone to the internet with a single click, making it dramatically easier to search the

web from a mobile phone. We're expecting this to drive an increase in demand for mobile data, which will help the whole industry," said Ron Garriques, president of mobile devices at Motorola.

The first Google-enabled phones will appear later this year, with all Motorola handsets eventually carrying the feature. Both companies hope to integrate services such as Google Local, which combines maps with local

advertising for places such as bars, shops and theatres.

Motorola said it was also in negotiations with Yahoo! to offer Yahoo! Go! Mobile on the same range of phones.

Motorola also announced a 10-year agreement with Kodak, which promises greatly improved camera phones with better photo quality and the ability automatically to detect and print images wirelessly to Kodak printers and kiosks.

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THE CURSE OF THE CHAMELEON

Corel's marketing team is hoping that CorelDraw's Carlos the Chameleon logo will help sell its software. However, the launch party at Regent's Park did not bode well.

Guest star Chris the Chameleon, a long-term resident of London Zoo, stood up the assembled journalists by dying the day before.

EUROPE'S ANSWER TO GOOGLE HIDES

Europe's plans to whack Google with a search engine of its own have been obscured after a fury of speculation following a speech by France's Jacques Chirac.

The *Financial Times* covered the French President's New Year speech, where he described Project Quaero, which is Latin for 'I seek', as a much-needed answer to "the global challenge posed by Google and Yahoo!"

The initiative will be funded by government and private entities in France and Germany. Thomson is expected to lead the French side, while Bertelsmann is reported to be Germany's main player.

In the light of derisory comments following in the wake of the announcement, Thomson has ordered a media blackout on the project and it has placed the section of its website behind closed doors, saying that it would not comment until it makes an official announcement.

MURDOCH UNVEILS VIDEO PLANS FOR MYSPACE.COM

Rupert Murdoch plans to begin selling video downloads through his recently acquired MySpace.com business. The News Corp boss told a technology and media conference in Arizona that there will be "millions of downloads a day probably".

However, Murdoch has already run into some trouble with MySpace users who, according to *The Independent*, have accused him of censoring postings and of blocking links to rival sites.



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■ STARBUCKS FILL IPODS TO GO

Starbucks may soon start filling iPods as well as coffee cups. The coffee chain recently opened CD-burning stations at its premises in five US cities and found that customers stay longer as a result.

"That experience can go anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes as they continue to browse and listen and make their music selections," said the head of Starbucks' entertainment division, Ken Lombard. Lombard wants to replicate the experience with iPods rather than CDs.

■ INTERNATIONAL PHISHING GANG SEIZED

Bulgarian authorities claim to have arrested a gang involved in an international phishing operation. The Bulgarian law-enforcement agency National Services to Combat Organized Crime (NSCOC) said it arrested eight people during raids last week. The suspects were picked up in three Bulgarian cities, in connection with financial fraud and identity-theft scams carried out over the internet.

The gang allegedly used spoofed emails that were designed to look as if they had come from MSN customer services as well as web pages mocked up to look like MSN content to dupe their victims.

■ HMV BOSS QUILTS, BLAMING INTERNET

Alan Giles, the CEO of high street music retailer HMV and Waterstones bookshops, announced he was resigning after the publication of poor sales figures in the run-up to Christmas. Overall sales grew by a meagre 0.7 per cent for the HMV stores in the five-weeks before Christmas, compared with the equivalent period in 2004.

Giles put a large chunk of the blame for the decline on competition from online retailers such as Amazon and iTunes. In an interview, Giles said that "one of the winners in 2005 was the internet". Although the company was one of the earliest in the UK to sell CDs online, it was late entering the music downloads business, in September 2005.

Twenty years of computer viruses

January 2006 saw the 20th anniversary of the first PC virus. Dubbed Brain, it was relatively harmless compared with today's malware, which uses the internet to propagate rapidly and wreak havoc across the world.

Brain was reportedly created by two brothers from Pakistan, who intended the program to delete pirated copies of software they had written. Brain was able to spread only through infected floppy disks, which is a slow way to spread a virus.

Like most viruses of its time, Brain was a boot sector virus. When you boot using a floppy disk, the boot sector of the floppy is loaded automatically into the PC's memory. If it contains a boot sector virus, the virus code is also copied to the computer. Once installed, the virus attempts to infect any other floppy disks used during the session.

As PCs became more connected, the nature and severity of the virus problem changed. Bulletin boards and, later, the internet greatly increased the rate of infection. Other developments didn't help, including Microsoft's decision to turn Visual Basic and Office macros into key

technologies. These gave applications control over other applications and even system functions. Macro viruses became widespread. The increasing dominance of a single Microsoft standard, the combination of Windows and Office, also made it easier for viruses to spread, just as monoculture helps pests proliferate.

Email really helps viruses to spread rapidly, as it encourages human interaction, which can



lead people unwittingly to instruct their PCs to download and launch malicious code.

In 1999 the Loveletter virus, also known as ILoveYou, was the first email worm to cause major financial losses. According to anti-virus outfit F-Secure, the transmission time for a typical virus outbreak shrunk from one day in 1999 to one hour by 2001. This was due to the emergence of new network worms that infected every online Windows PC they encountered indiscriminately.

There are now more than 150,000 viruses at large in the PC world, and the number is growing rapidly. The main change over the past 20 years has not been the type of malware, but the motives of its creators. "The most significant change has been the evolution of virus-writing hobbyists into criminally operated gangs bent on financial gain," said F-Secure's chief research officer Mikko Hypponen. "This trend is showing no signs of stopping."

Hypponen predicts that virus writers will always be on the lookout for new opportunities. "There are already indications that malware authors will target laptop [wireless networks] as the next vector for spreading worms automatically. Whatever the next step might be, it will be interesting to see what kind of viruses we will be talking about in another 20 years – computer viruses infecting household appliances, perhaps?"

Europe launches first GPS satellite

The European Space Agency (ESA) has successfully launched the first satellite in its Galileo project, which will provide an alternative to the Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system run by the US military.

The ESA satellite, Giove-A, launched on 28th December 2005, and on 12th January successfully transmitted the first signals for the Galileo positioning system. The entire system will use around 30 satellites and is expected to be fully operational by 2010.

"Galileo will be Europe's very own global navigation satellite system, providing a highly accurate and guaranteed positioning service under civilian control. It will be inter-operable with the

two other systems: the US Global Positioning System and Russia's Global Navigation Satellite. Galileo will deliver real-time positioning services with unrivalled accuracy and integrity," said an ESA spokesman.

Britain has a played a major role in the Galileo project. The prime contractor was Surrey Satellite Technology, and the first signals from Giove-A were received and analysed by the Galileo receivers using a 25m diameter dish belonging to the Chilbolton Observatory Facilities for Atmospheric and Radio Research in Hampshire.

The Galileo project, which uses Russian Soyuz rockets and some Chinese financing, is the ESA's most ambitious project and has the

biggest budget so far. The ESA claims it will be more accurate and reliable than America's GPS.

The GPS may be free for anyone to use, but the US military reserves the right to shut off the signal if it deems it necessary for US security. GPS, which is focused on the US, is often inaccurate by up to 30 feet in various locations around the world. By contrast, the more modern Galileo is accurate to within three feet and is a civilian project.

The ESA hopes that Galileo will create new industries. For example, road tolls including the GLA's scheme in London will be much easier to administer, and it will make air traffic control safer. Road safety and goods delivery could also benefit from Galileo's precision.

It has been suggested that transmitters could be embedded in all vehicles, making theft virtually impossible. Governments will inevitably use Galileo as a surveillance tool too, with alarming implications for privacy.